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Fortin et al.

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(54) **MICROELECTROMECHANICAL SYSTEM
PRESSURE SENSOR AND METHOD FOR
MAKING AND USING**

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U.S.C. 154(b) by 348 days.

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
H01L 29/78 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **257/415**; 257/417; 257/108;
438/50

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 438/53,
438/396, 459; 257/108, 414, 415, 417
See application file for complete search history.

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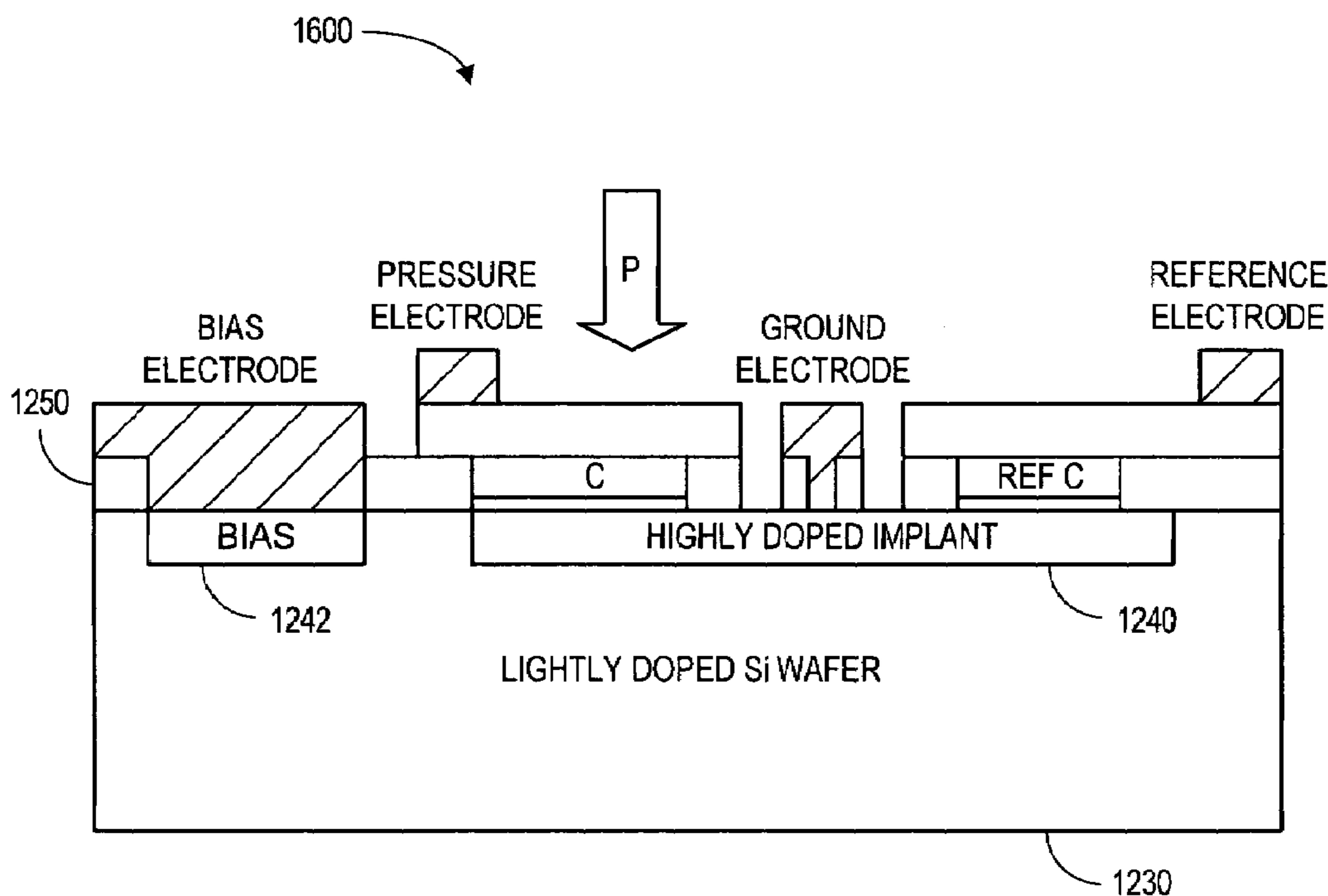
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

According to some embodiments, a conducting layer is formed on a first wafer. An insulating layer is formed on a second wafer. The insulating layer includes a cavity and a conducting area may be formed in the second wafer proximate to the cavity. The side of the conducting layer opposite the first wafer is bonded to the side of the insulating layer opposite the second wafer. At least some of the first wafer is then removed, without removing at least some of the conducting layer, to form a conducting diaphragm that is substantially parallel to the second wafer. In this way, an amount of capacitance between the diaphragm and the conducting area may be measured to determine an amount of pressure being applied to the diaphragm.

11 Claims, 22 Drawing Sheets



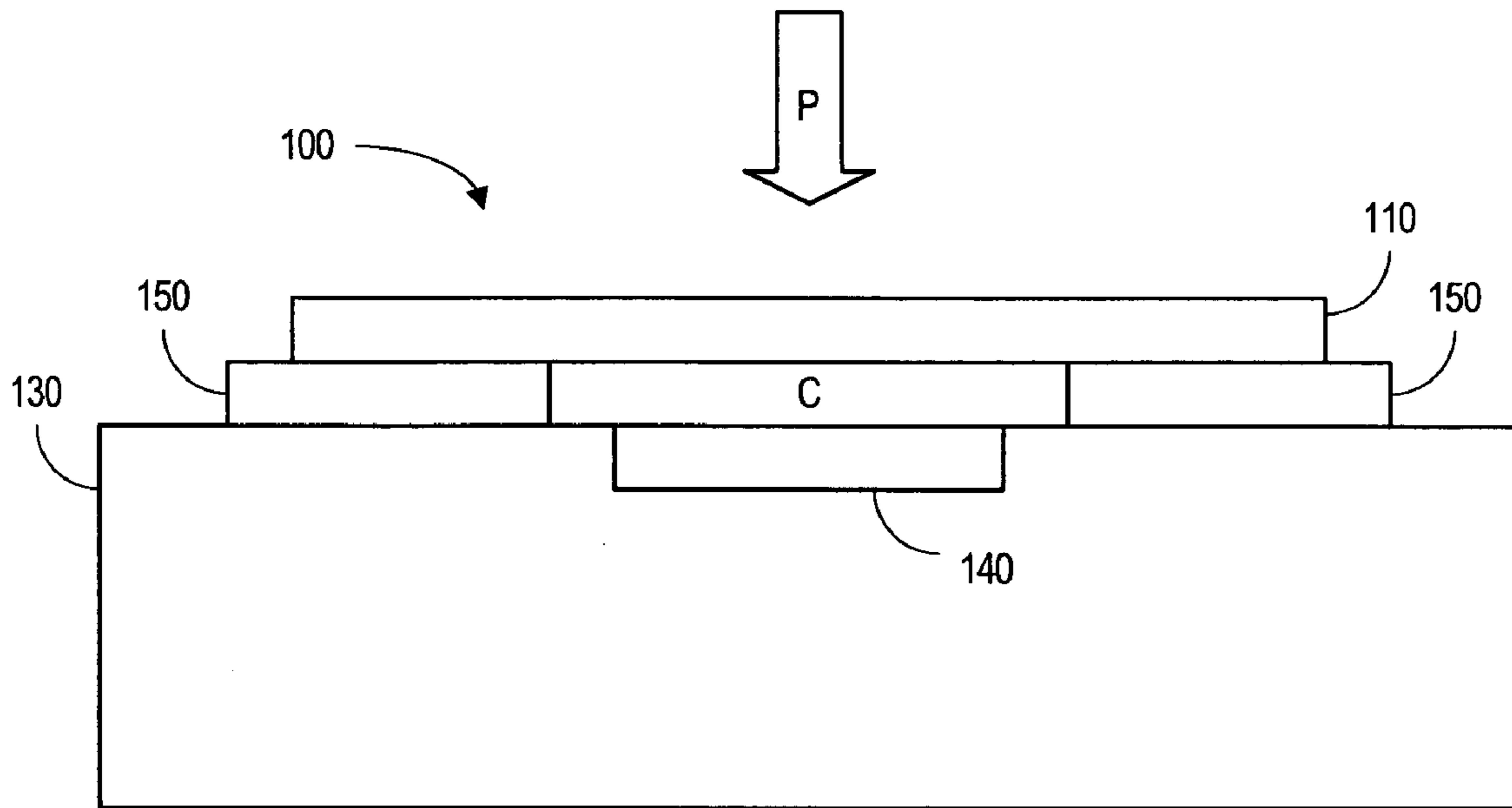


FIG. 1

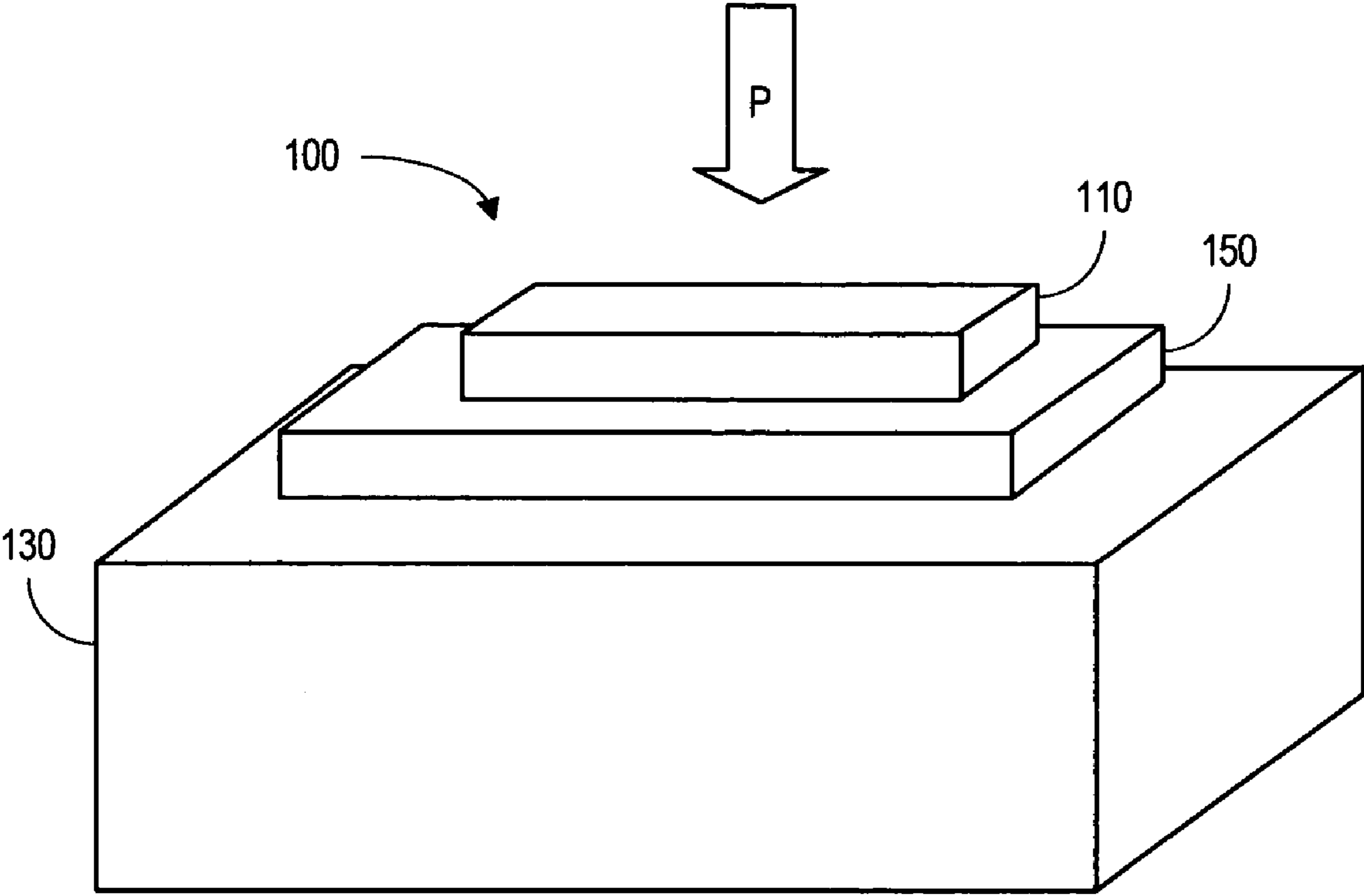


FIG. 2

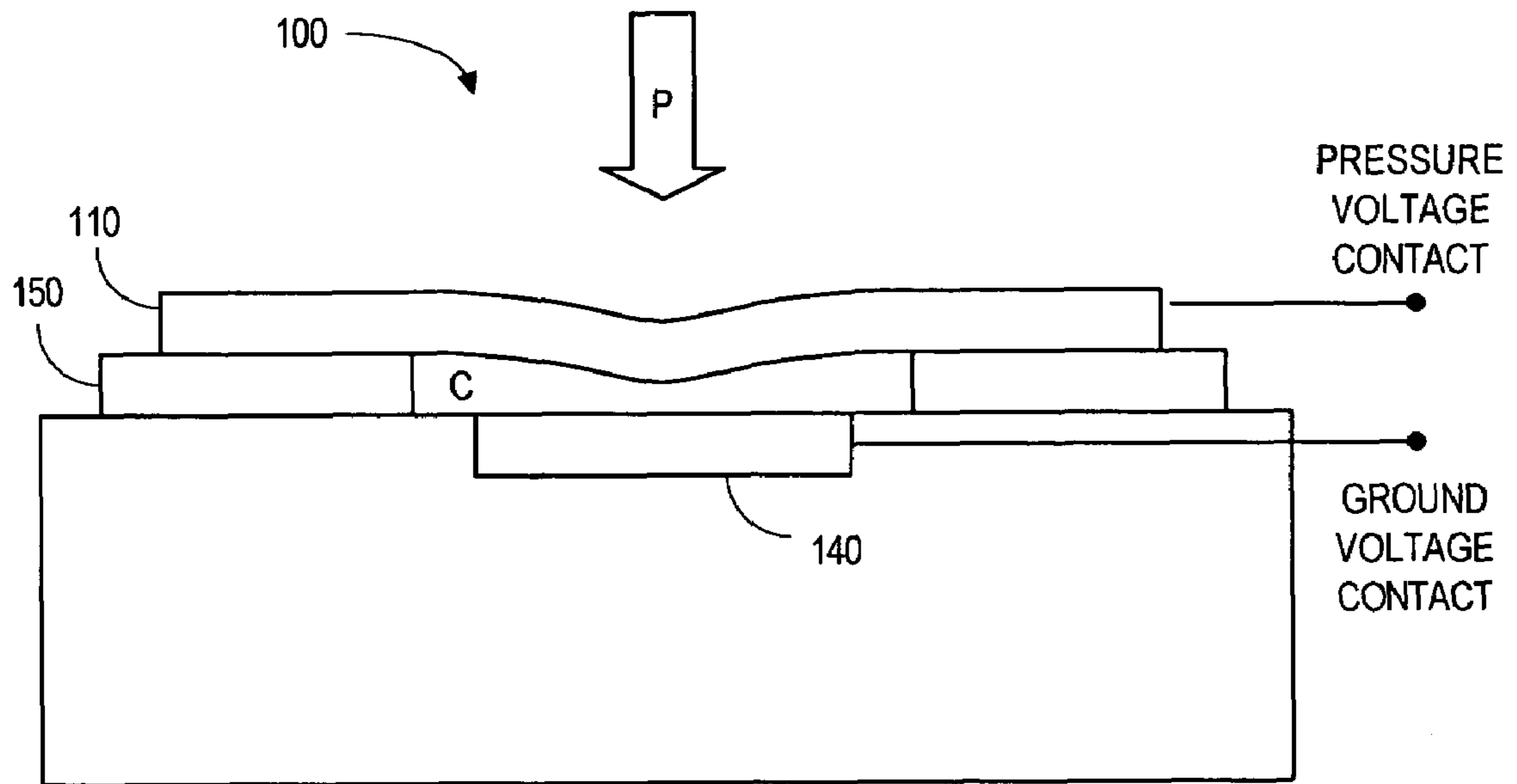


FIG. 3

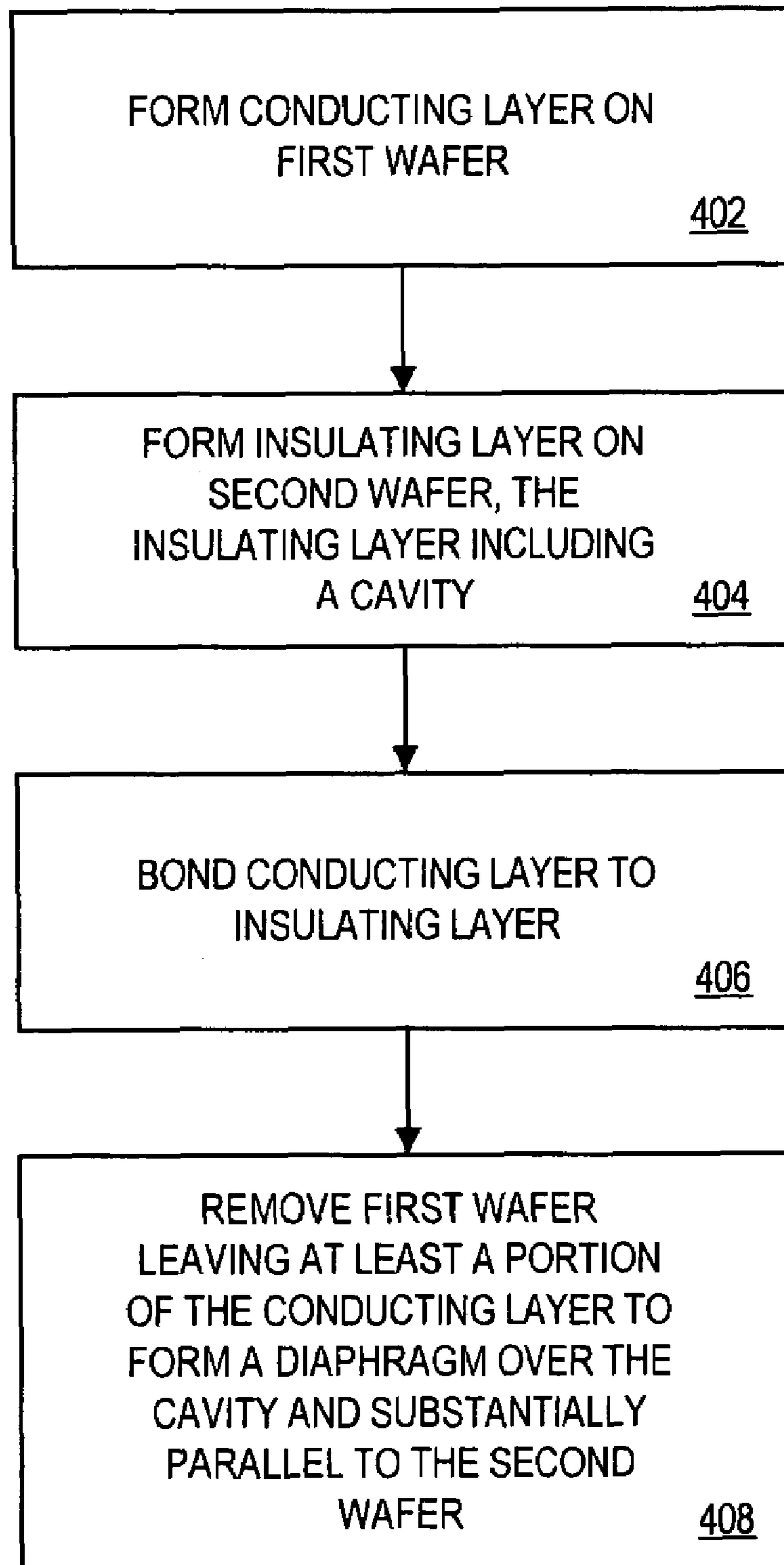


FIG. 4

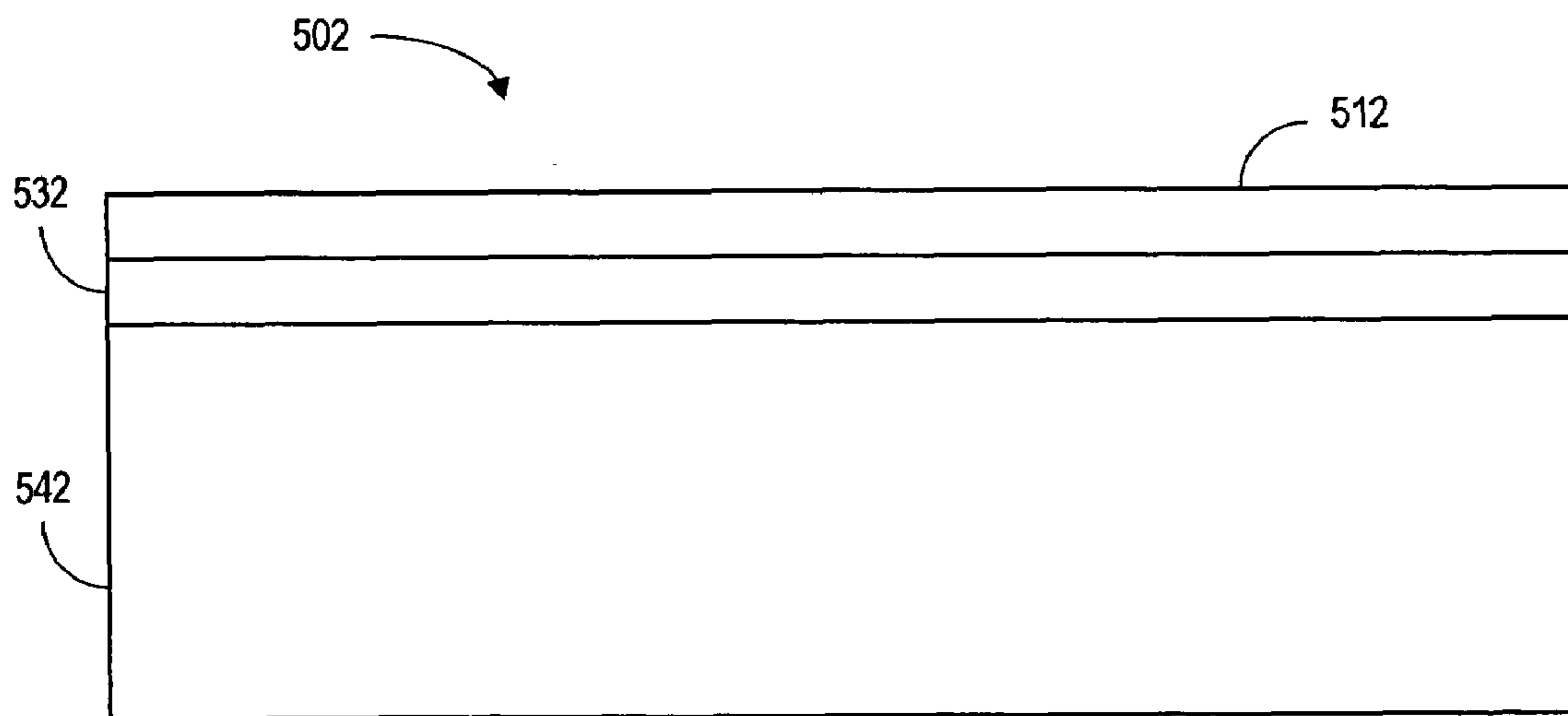
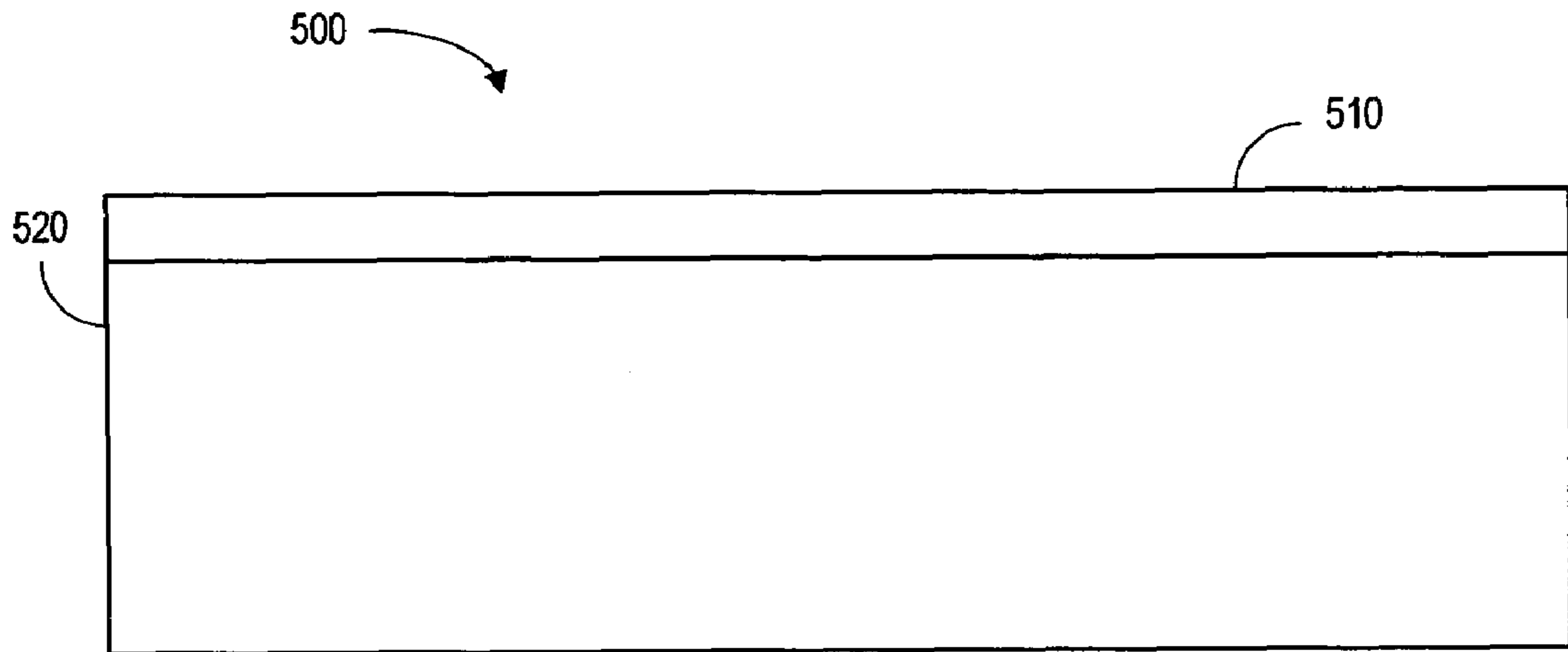


FIG. 5

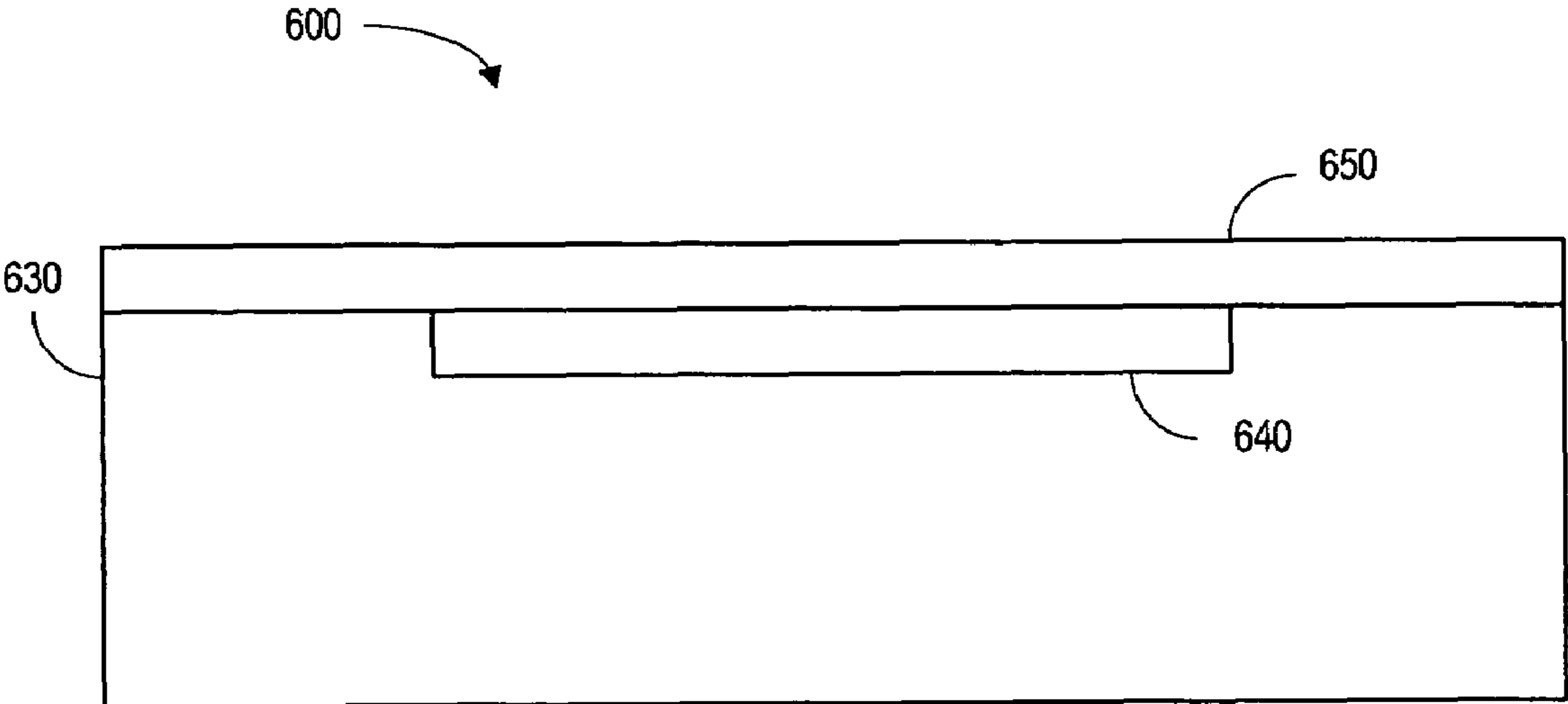


FIG. 6

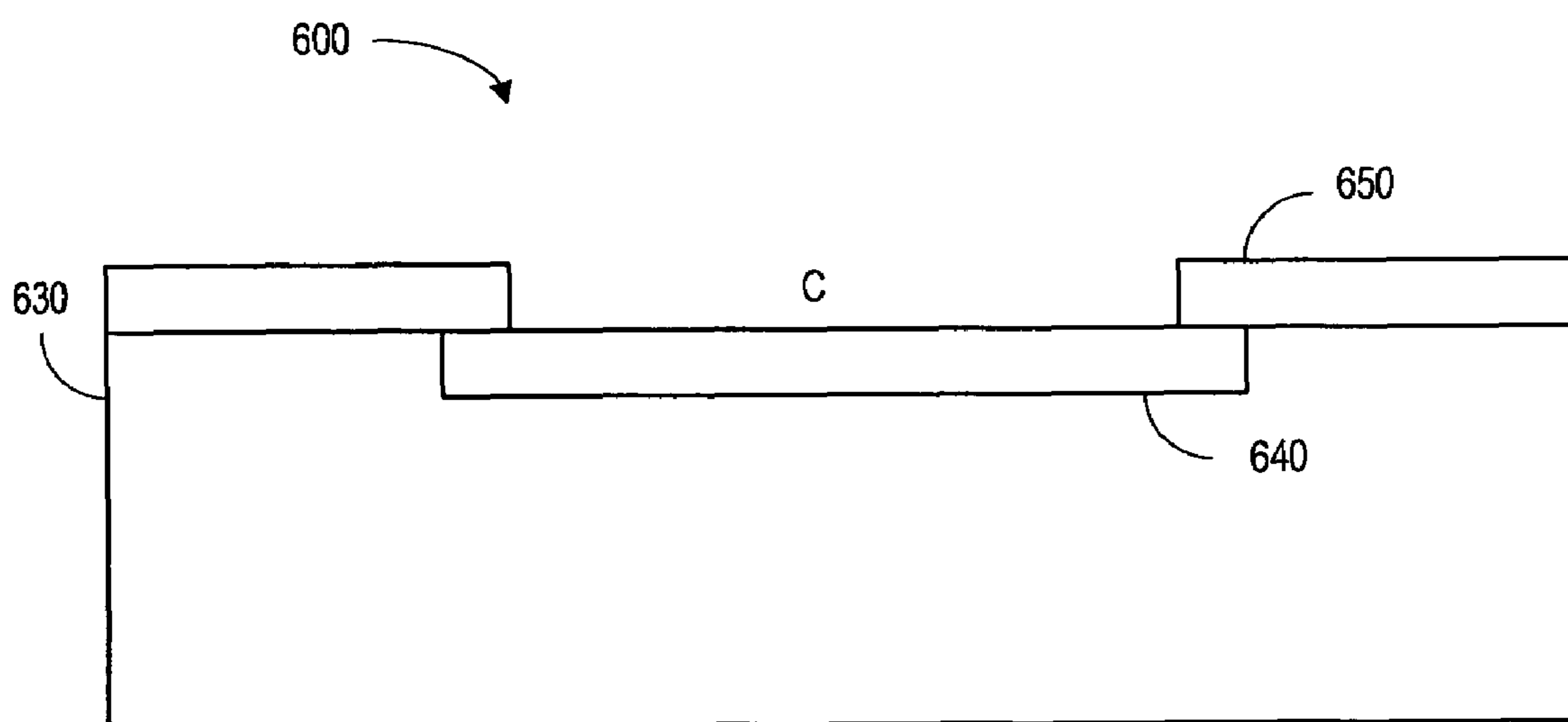


FIG. 7

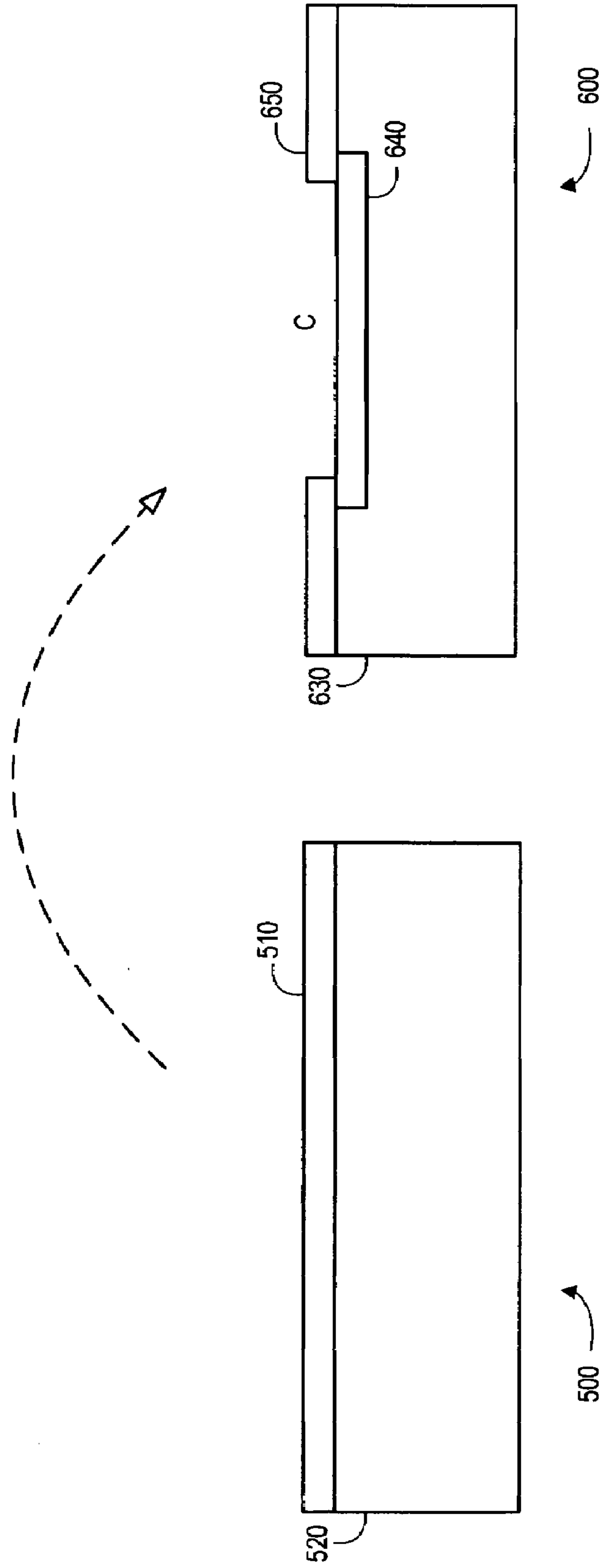


FIG. 8

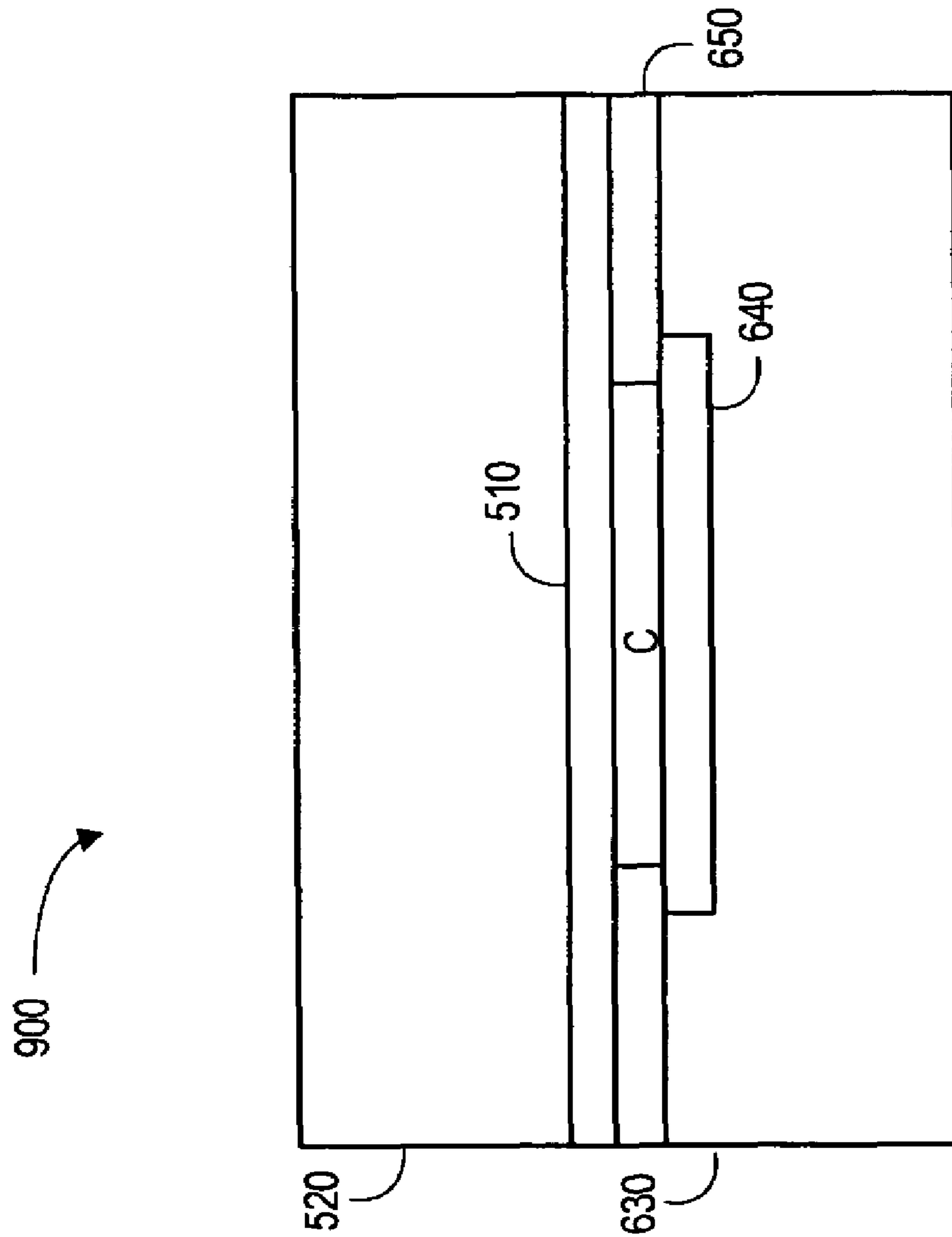


FIG. 9

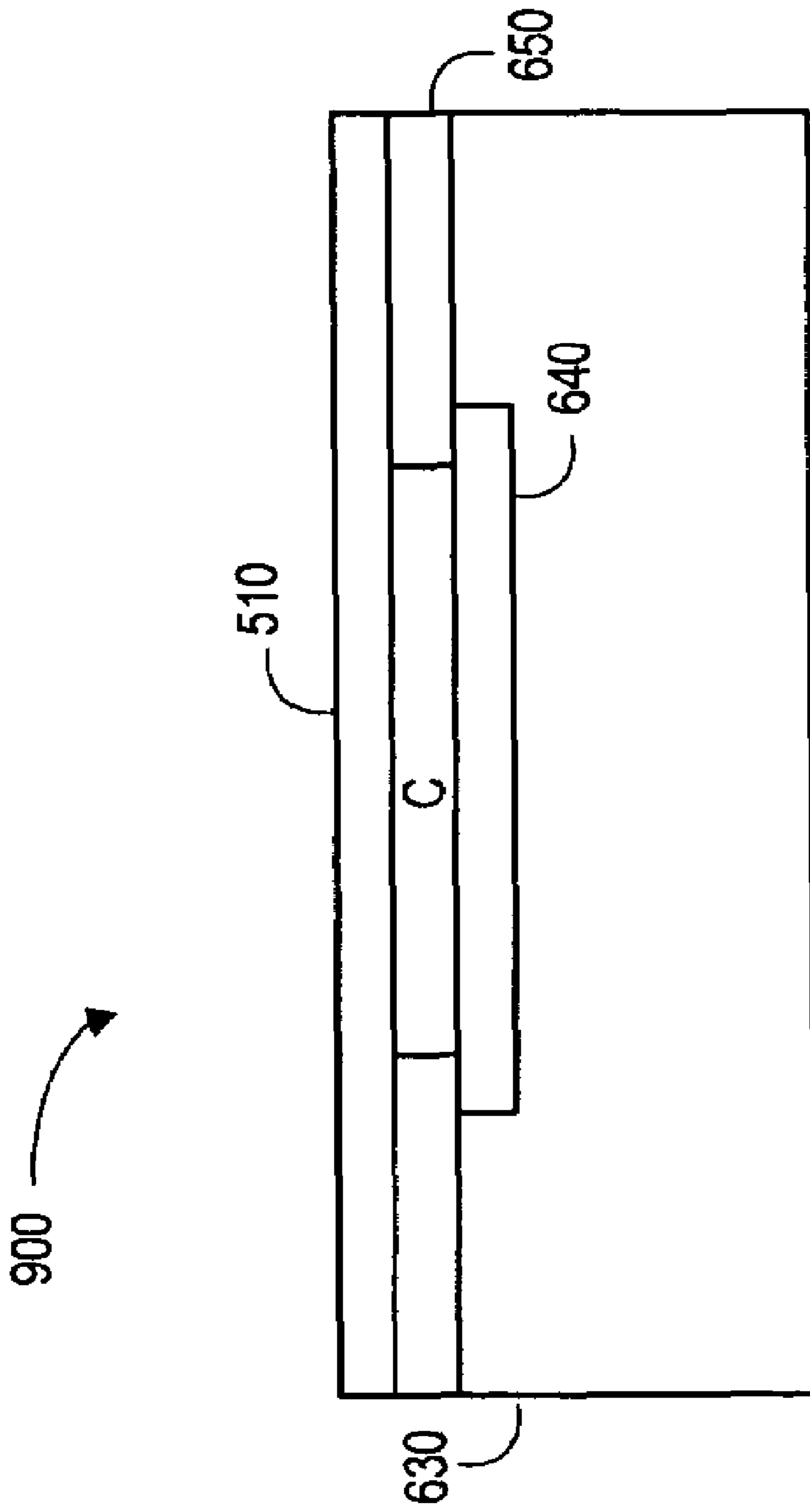


FIG. 10

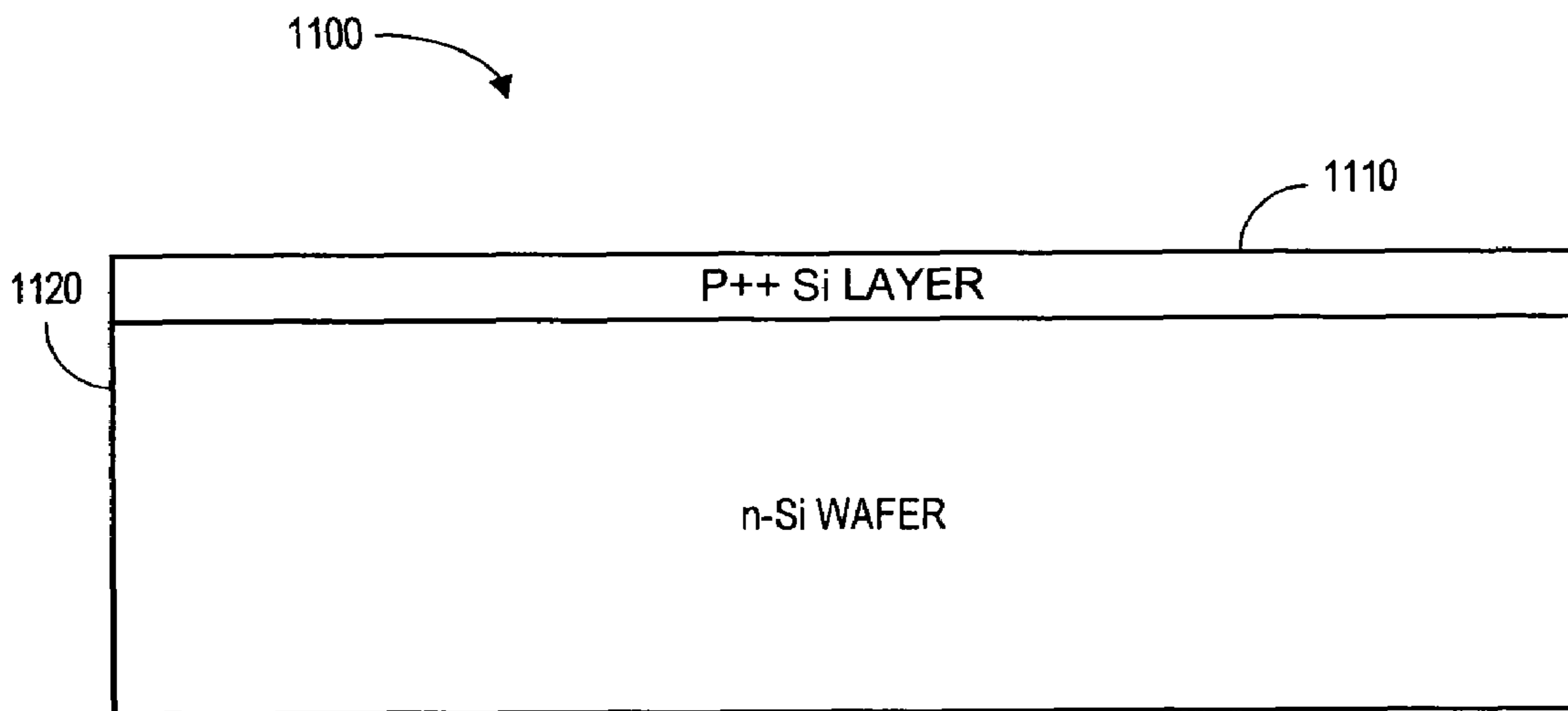


FIG. 11

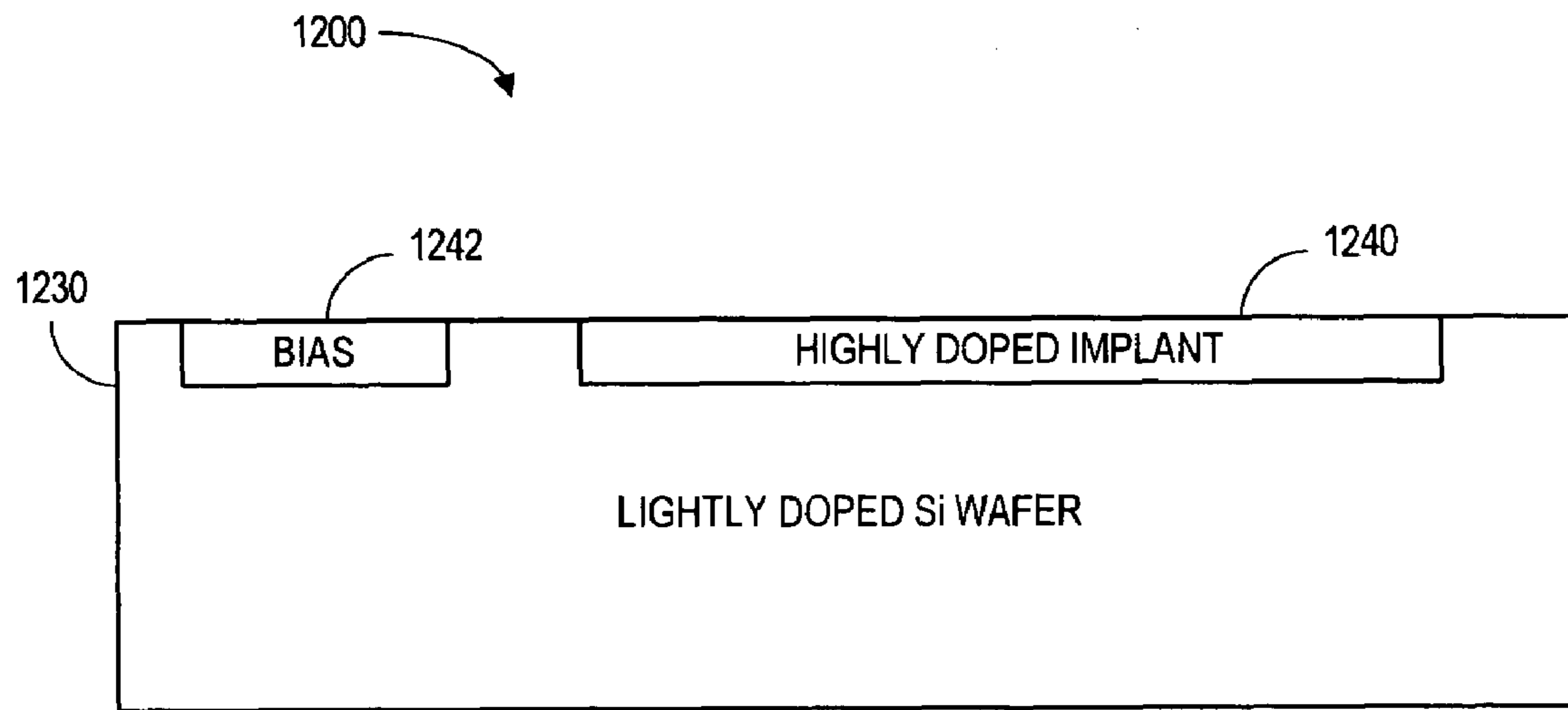


FIG. 12

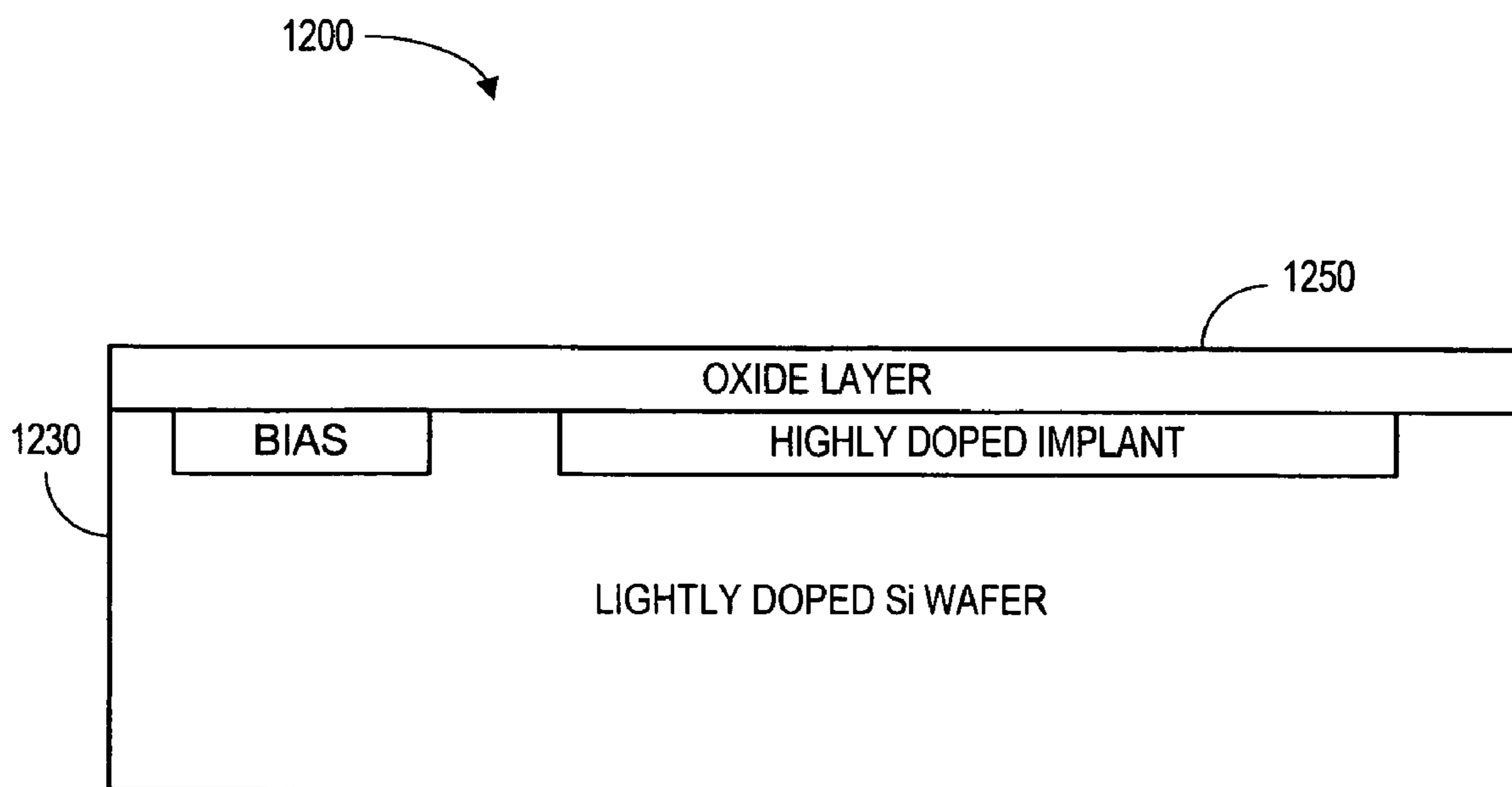


FIG. 13

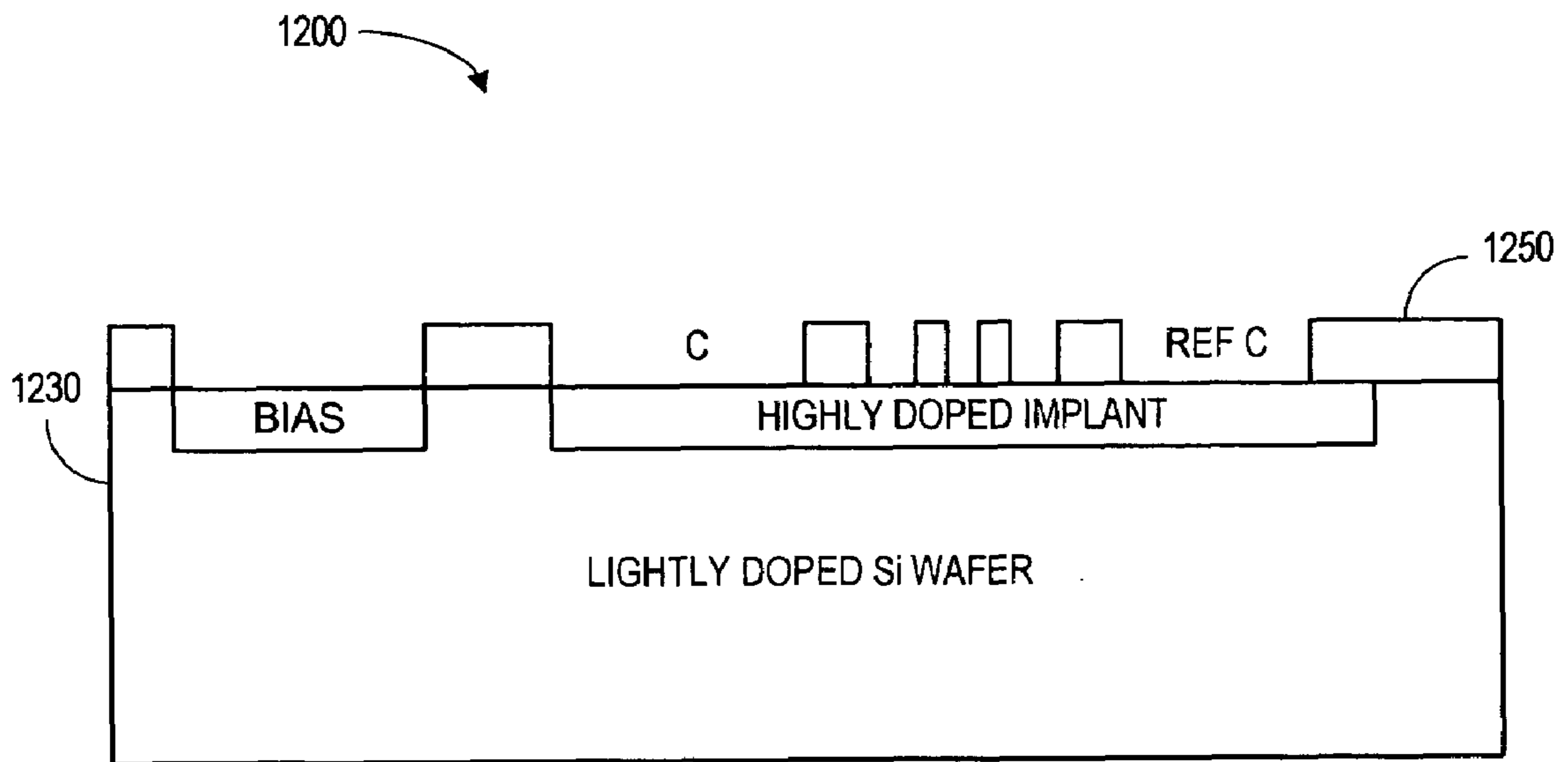


FIG. 14

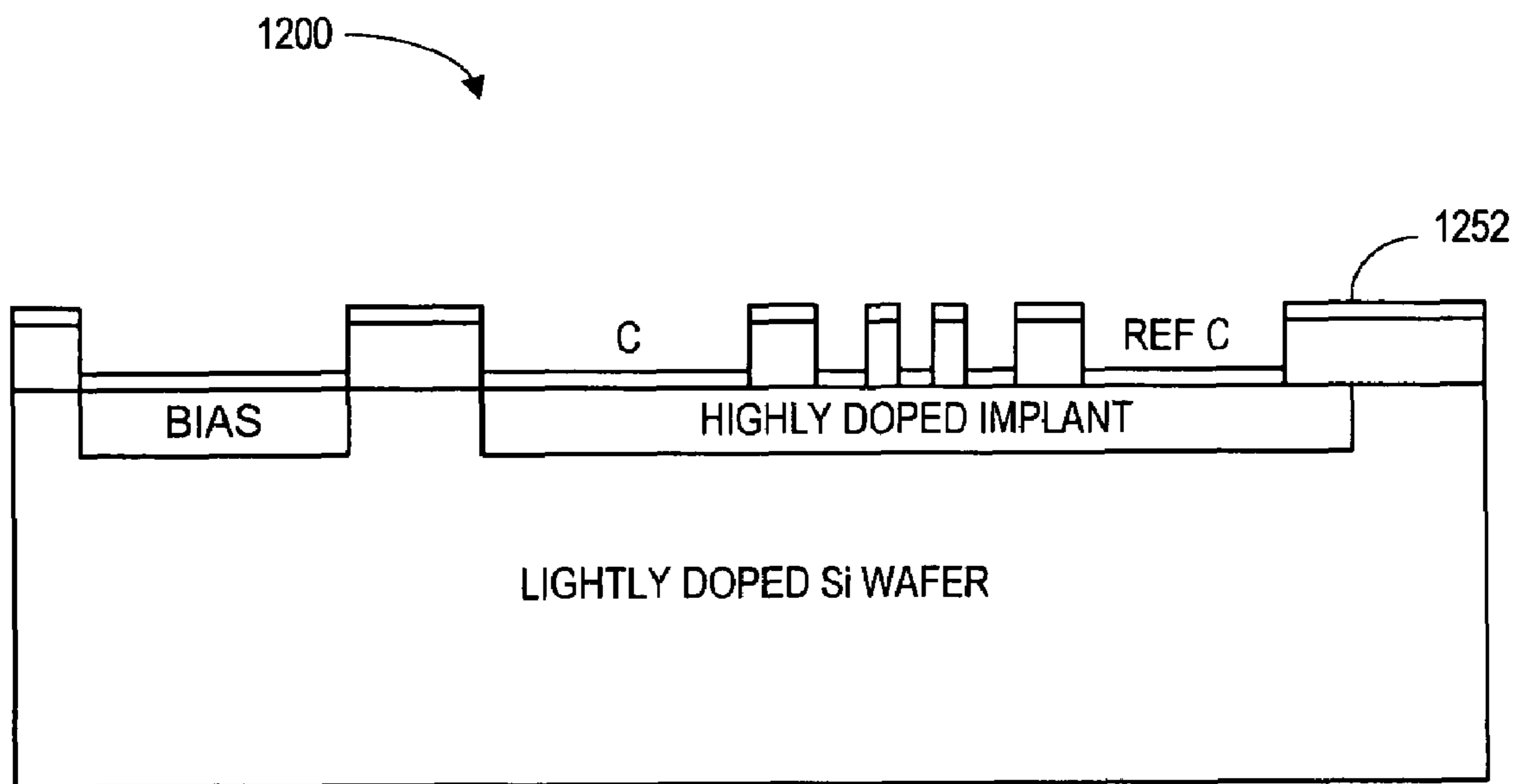


FIG. 15

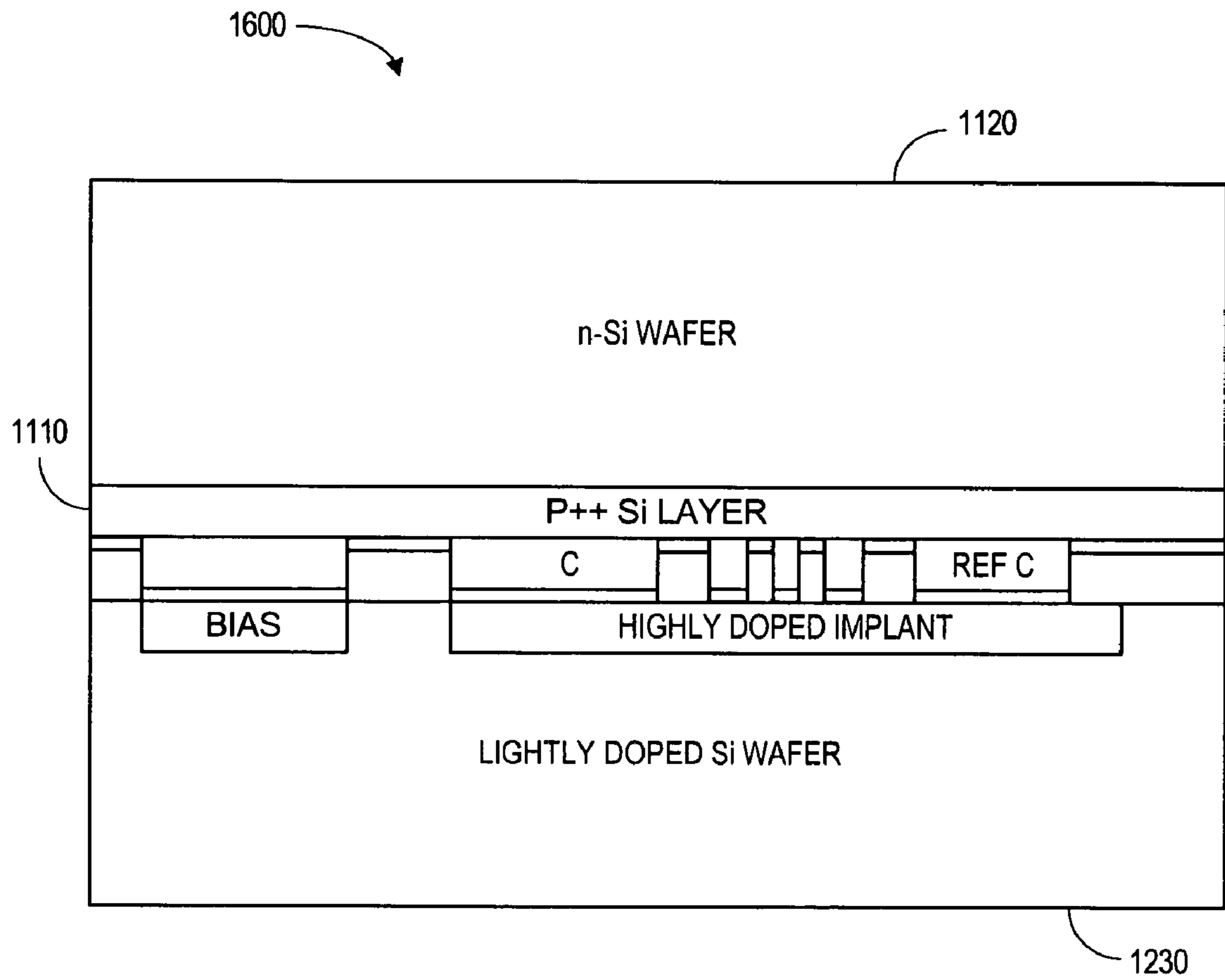


FIG. 16

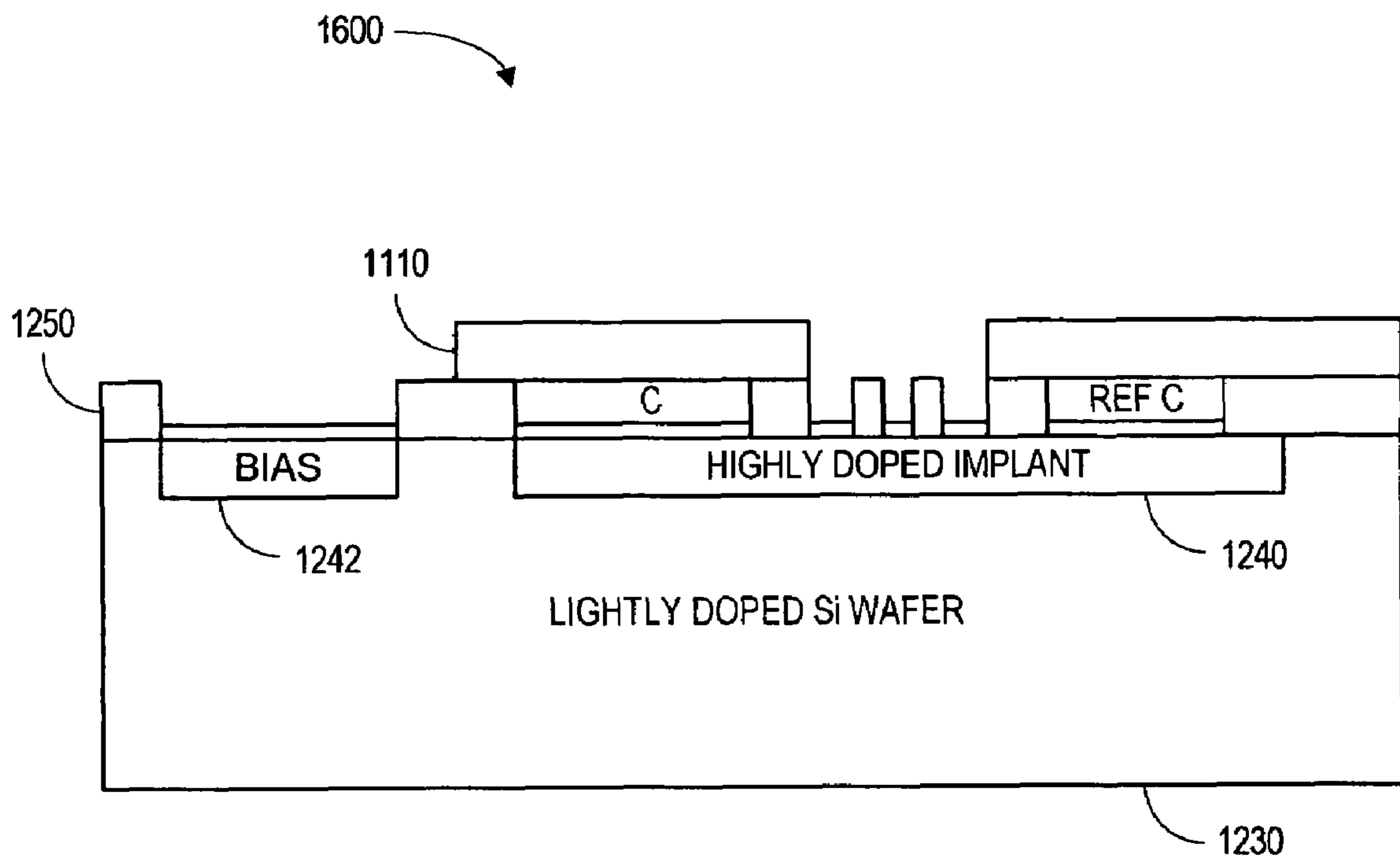


FIG. 17

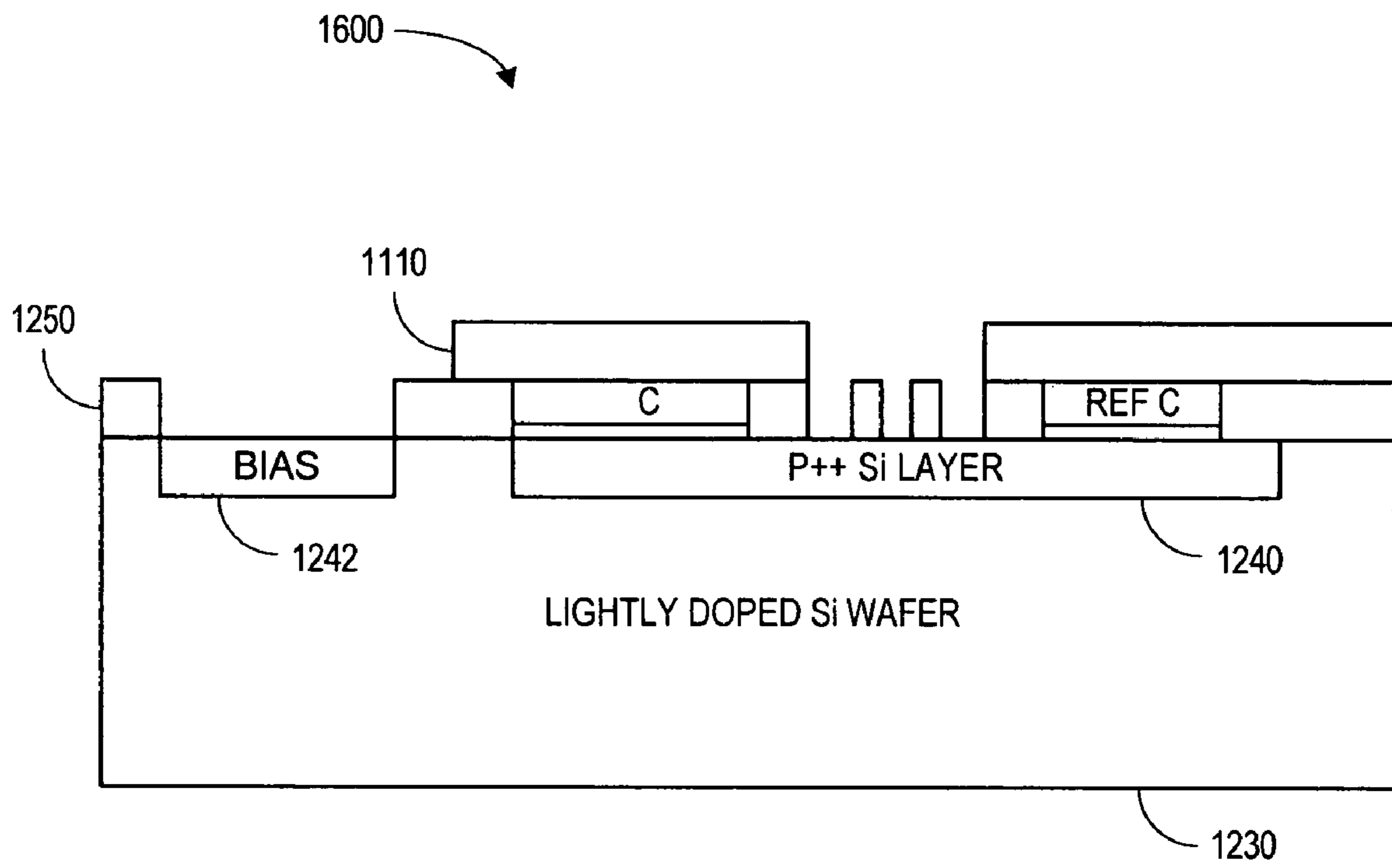


FIG. 18

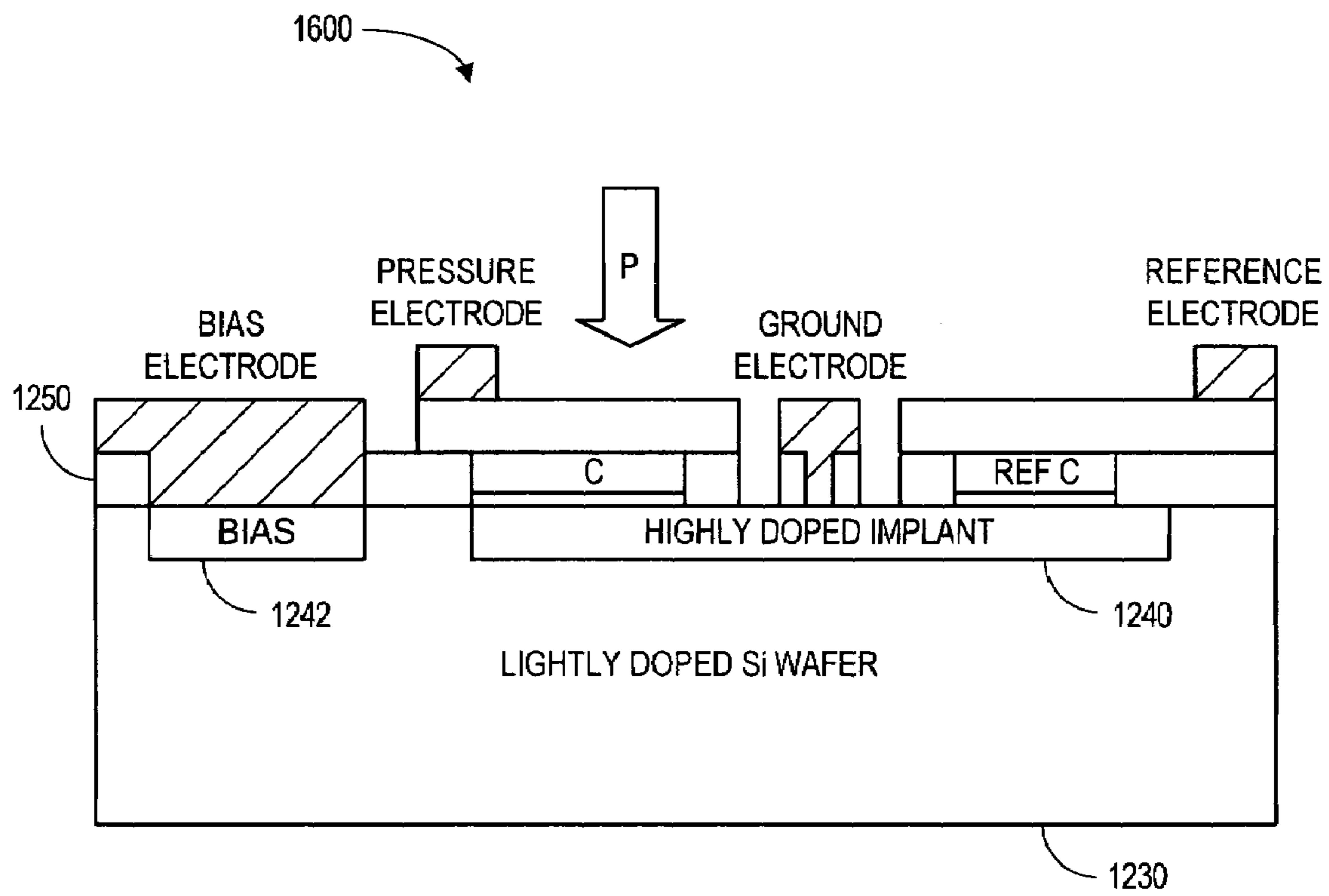


FIG. 19

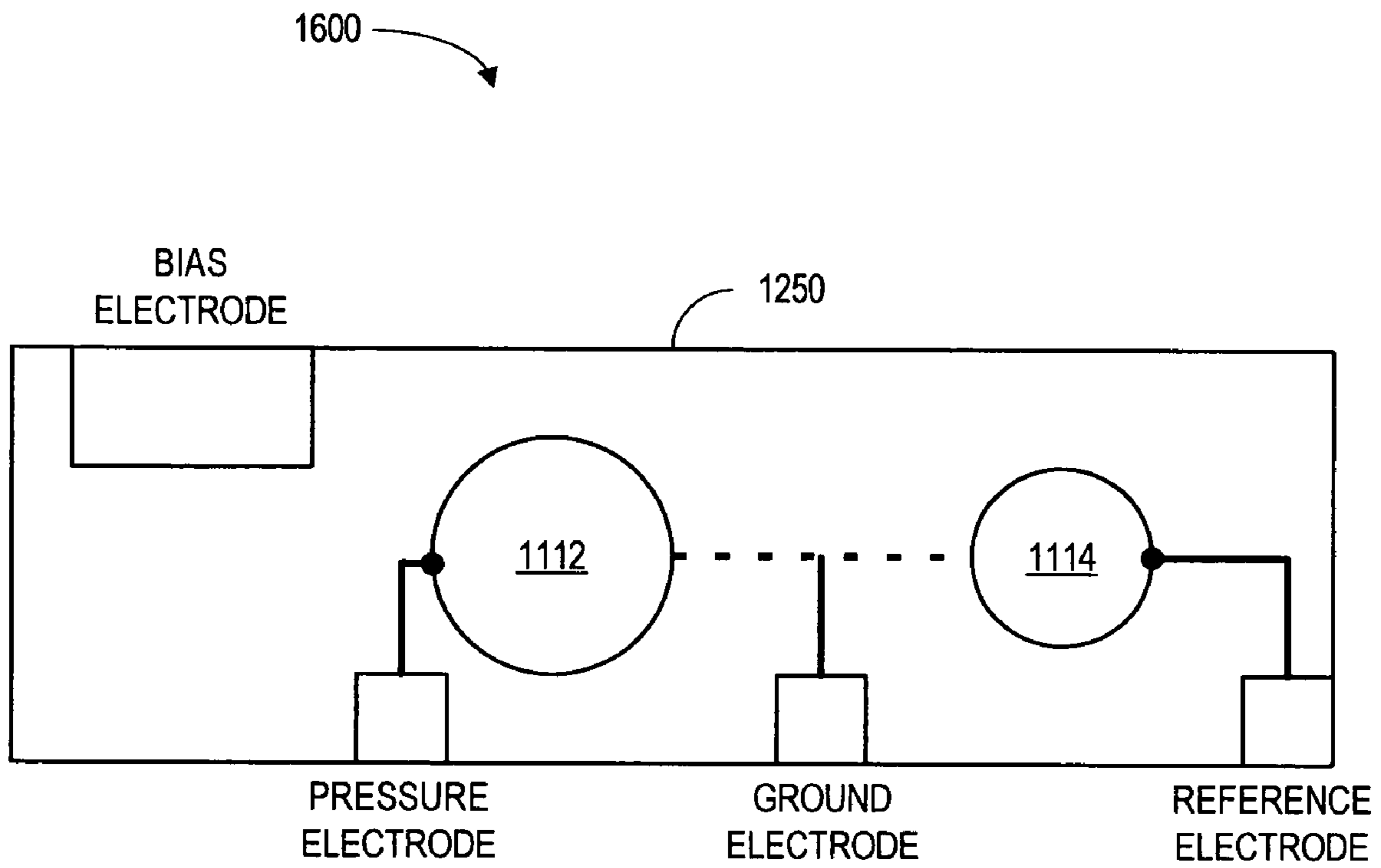


FIG. 20

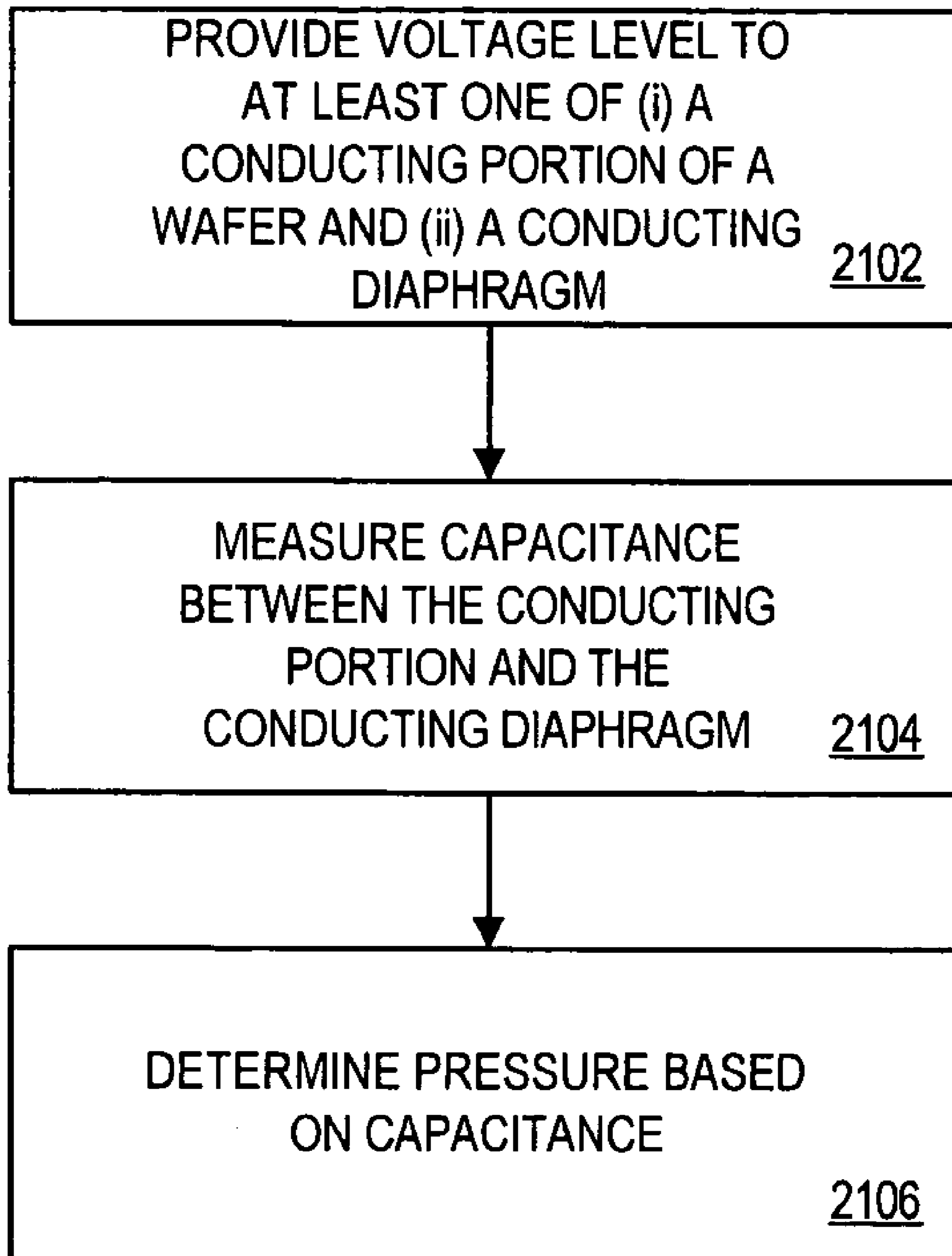


FIG. 21

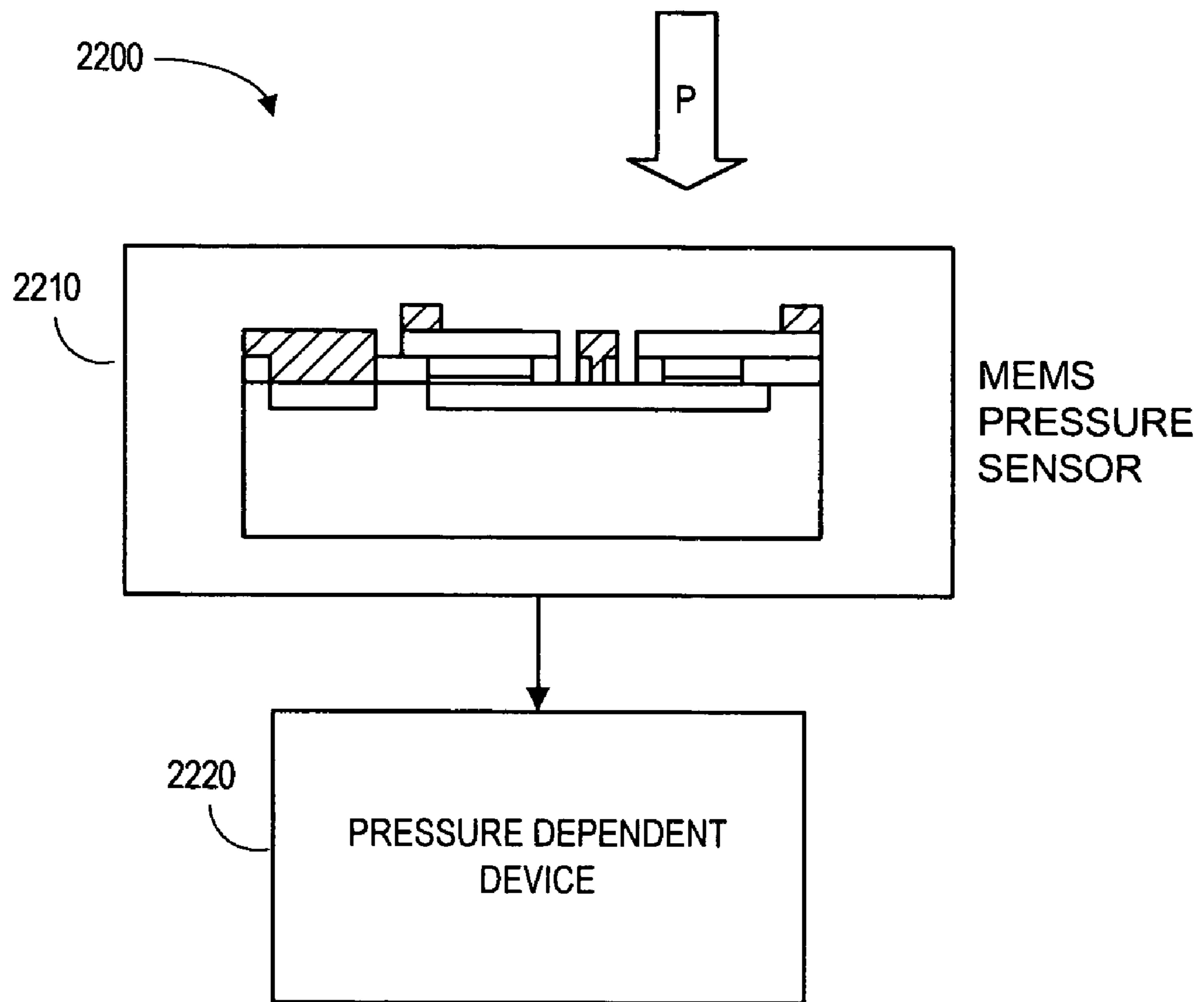


FIG. 22

MICROELECTROMECHANICAL SYSTEM PRESSURE SENSOR AND METHOD FOR MAKING AND USING

BACKGROUND

A pressure sensor may convert an amount of pressure into an electrical value. For example, a pressure sensor may include a diaphragm or membrane positioned over a well formed in a substrate. When the diaphragm and the bottom of the well are conductors and are electrically isolated from each other, an amount of pressure being applied to the diaphragm may be converted into a capacitance value. Creating such a sensor, however, can be a complex process (e.g., bulk micro-machining might be used to form the well in a ceramic or glass substrate). Moreover, even small variations in the dimensions of the diaphragm or the well can reduce the accuracy and/or sensitivity of the sensor. In addition, parasitics associated with the sensing region may further degrade the sensor's performance.

SUMMARY

According to some embodiments, a conducting layer may be formed on a first wafer. An insulating layer may be formed on a second wafer, and the insulating layer may include a cavity. The side of the conducting layer opposite the first wafer may then be bonded to the side of the insulating layer opposite the second wafer. At least a portion of the first wafer may then be removed, without removing at least a portion of the conducting layer associated with the cavity, to form a diaphragm substantially parallel to the second wafer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a side view of a pressure sensor in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the pressure sensor of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a side view of the pressure sensor of FIG. 1 when exposed to a pressure.

FIG. 4 illustrates a method to create a pressure sensor according to some embodiments.

FIGS. 5 through 10 are side views illustrating the construction of a pressure sensor in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

FIGS. 11 through 19 are side views illustrating the construction of a pressure sensor in accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 20 is a top view of a pressure sensor in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 21 illustrates a method to measure pressure according to some embodiments.

FIG. 22 is a system constructed in accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 is a side view of a pressure sensor 100 in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The sensor 100 may be, for example, a Microelectromechanical System (MEMS) device formed using a wafer 130, such as a wafer 130 of lightly doped silicon. The top surface of the wafer 130 may be a substantially flat surface that defines a plane, and an insulating layer 150 may be formed on that surface of the wafer 130. The insulating layer 150 may be, for example, a

layer of oxide grown or deposited on the wafer 130. The insulating layer 150 includes a cavity C.

A conducting portion 140 may be formed in or on the wafer 130 in the area beneath the cavity C. The conducting portion 140 may be, for example, an area of highly doped silicon. The area of the conducting portion 140 may be smaller than, larger than, or equal to the area of the cavity C.

A conducting diaphragm 110 may be bonded to the insulating layer 150 over the cavity C. For example, the conducting diaphragm 110 may be a thin, flexible membrane that covers the cavity C and that is substantially parallel to the plane defined by the surface of the wafer 130.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the pressure sensor 100 of FIG. 1. In particular, the conducting diaphragm 110 is attached to the insulating layer 150, which in turn is attached to the wafer 130 to form the cavity C (not illustrated in FIG. 2). In this way, the conducting diaphragm 110 may be electrically isolated from the conducting portion 140 of the wafer 130 located below the cavity C. Although a rectangular conducting diaphragm 110, insulating layer 150, and wafer 130 are illustrated in FIG. 2, these elements may have any other type of shape (e.g., the conducting diaphragm 110 and insulating layer 150 may form a disc-shaped cavity).

Note that the conducting diaphragm 110 may be deformable in a direction substantially normal to the plane defined by the surface of the wafer 130. For example, as illustrated in FIG. 3 the conducting diaphragm 110 may flex toward the conducting portion 140 in response to a pressure (P). That is, the distance between at least a portion of the conducting diaphragm 110 and the conducting portion 140 may decrease when the pressure P increases. Note that the conducting diaphragm 110 may include non-conducting portions. For example, the conducting diaphragm 110 might be formed using an insulating material with a layer of metal deposited on top.

Note that a capacitance between the conducting diaphragm 110 and the conducting portion 140 depends in part on the distance between them. In particular, because the conducting diaphragm 110 and the conducting portion 140 are electrically isolated from each other, the capacitance between them will increase as they move closer to each other. An increase in the pressure P, therefore, can be measured based on the increased capacitance, since the increased pressure P will push at least a portion of the conducting diaphragm 110 closer to the conducting portion 140.

According to some embodiments, a voltage level (e.g., a ground voltage or a voltage V) may be associated with at least one of the conducting portion 140 and the conducting diaphragm 110. For example, a pressure voltage contact may be connected to the conducting diaphragm 110 and a ground voltage contact may be connected to the conducting portion 140. Moreover, the pressure P may be measured based at least in part on the capacitance between the conducting portion 140 and the conducting diaphragm 110 (e.g., an increase in the pressure P may be associated with an increase in capacitance).

FIG. 4 illustrates a method to create a pressure sensor according to some embodiments. At Step 402, a conducting layer is formed on a first wafer. For example, FIG. 5 illustrates a first portion 500 of a pressure sensor that includes a conducting layer 510 formed on a first wafer 520. The first wafer 520 might comprise, for example, a lightly doped silicon wafer. The conducting layer 510 might be formed, for example, by epitaxially growing a highly doped layer on the first wafer 520. According to some embodiments, the surface of the highly doped layer 510 opposite the first wafer 520 is substantially smooth. FIG. 5 also illustrates another embodi-

ment of a first portion **502** which utilizes a highly doped silicon layer of a Silicon On Insulator (SOI) wafer. In particular, this embodiment the first portion **502** may include a thin layer of silicon **512** on a layer of oxide **532**, which in turn is bonded to a silicon substrate **542**.

Referring again to FIG. **4**, an insulating layer is formed on a second wafer at Step **404**. For example, FIG. **6** illustrates a second portion **600** of a pressure sensor that includes an insulating layer **650** formed on a second wafer **630**.

The second wafer **630** may be, for example, a silicon wafer or an SOI wafer. Moreover, a conducting area **640** may have been provided in or on the second wafer **630** (e.g., the conducting area **640** might be implanted before the insulating layer **650** was added). When the second wafer **630** is a lightly doped silicon wafer, for example, the conducting area **640** might be a highly doped area created by a suitable mechanism or process, such as, for example, via diffusion or ion bombardment. The second wafer **630** may, according to some embodiments, be a highly doped, conducting silicon wafer.

The insulating layer **650** may be, for example, a layer of oxide that has been deposited or grown on the second wafer **630**. According to some embodiments, the surface of the oxide layer **650** opposite the second wafer **630** is substantially smooth.

According to some embodiments, a cavity is then created in the insulating layer in an area proximate to the conducting area **640**. For example, a pattern mask and a potassium hydroxide wash may be used to form a cavity **C** as illustrated in FIG. **7**. Note that the size of the cavity **C** might be smaller, larger, or equal to the size of the conducting area **640**.

Referring again to FIG. **4**, the first portion **500** and the second portion **600** of the sensor may be bonded together at Step **406**. In particular, as illustrated in FIG. **8**, the surface of the conducting layer **510** opposite the first wafer **520** may be bonded to the surface of the insulating layer **650** opposite the second wafer **630**.

The combined first portion **500** and second portion **600** can then be used to create a pressure sensor **900** as illustrated in FIG. **9**. Referring again to FIG. **4**, at Step **408** at least a portion of the first wafer **520** is then removed (without removing at least a portion of the conducting layer **510** associated with the cavity **C**) to form a diaphragm substantially parallel to the second wafer **630**.

FIG. **10** illustrates the pressure sensor **900** after the first wafer **520** has been completely removed. The sensor **900** may function as a MEMS capacitive pressure sensor because the conducting layer **510** will flex toward the conducting area **640** in response to an external pressure. An increase in pressure, therefore, can be measured based on an increase in capacitance between the conducting layer **510** and the conducting area **640**.

FIGS. **11** through **19** are side views illustrating the construction of a pressure sensor in accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the invention. A first portion **1100** of the sensor includes a conducting layer **1110** formed on a first wafer **1120** as illustrated in FIG. **11**. The first wafer **1120** is an n-Si wafer and the conducting layer **1110** is a highly doped layer of p++ Si. The conducting layer **1110** may be, for example, approximately 3 μm thick. Moreover, the conducting layer **1110** may be doped with Boron or Boron/Germanium and may have been epitaxially grown on the first wafer **1120**. According to some embodiments, the first portion **1100** instead comprises a SOI wafer. Note that steps may be taken to ensure that the surface of the conducting layer **1110** opposite the first wafer **1120** is substantially smooth and flat (e.g., to facilitate bonding).

As illustrated in FIG. **12**, a second portion **1200** may include a second wafer **1230**, such as a standard, n-type lightly doped silicon wafer or an intrinsic wafer. Moreover, a conducting area **1240** is provided in or on the second wafer **1230**. The conducting area **1240** may comprise, for example, a p+ or p++ highly doped implant formed using diffusion and/or ion bombardment. Note that as various layers are added to, and removed from, the second portion **1200**, steps may be taken to ensure that the top surface of the second portion **1200** remains substantially smooth and flat (e.g., to facilitate bonding with the first portion **1100**). For example, it may be difficult to bond the first portion **1100** to the second portion **1200** if the second portion **1200** has become substantially warped.

According to some embodiments, a bias area **1242** is also provided in or on the second wafer **1230**. The bias area **1242** may include, for example, an n+ portion that will be used to positively bias the substrate of the second wafer **1230** (e.g., with a potential equal to that which will be applied to a conducting diaphragm). As a result, parasitic capacitance associated with the sensor may be reduced.

As illustrated in FIG. **13**, an insulating layer **1250** is formed on the surface of the second wafer **1230**. According to some embodiments, a layer of oxide approximately 3 μm thick may be grown or deposited on the second wafer **1230**. By growing the insulating layer **1250** on the second wafer **1230**, the thickness of the cavity that is eventually produced can be tightly controlled (e.g., as compared to a well that is created using bulk micromachining).

A photo-resist pattern may be used to remove portions of the insulating layer **1250**. In particular, a cavity **C** may be created proximate to the conducting area **1240** of the second wafer **1230** (FIG. **14**). In addition, a portion of the insulating layer **1250** may be removed to expose the bias area **1242** of the second wafer **1230**. According to some embodiments, other portions of the insulating layer **1250** are removed to create a reference cavity REF **C** and to expose the conducting area **2140** of the second wafer **1230** (e.g., so that a ground voltage can be provided to the conducting area **2140**). According to other embodiments, the insulating layer **1250** is not removed from the reference cavity REF **C** (in which case the oxide will act as the dielectric for the reference sensor instead of air or a vacuum).

A non-conducting protective layer **1252** may then be provided on the insulating layer **1250** as illustrated in FIG. **15**. The protective layer **1252** may be, for example, a 150 nanometer (nm) layer of oxide that is grown or deposited on the second portion **1200**. According to some embodiments, the protective layer **1252** may prevent a conducting diaphragm over the cavity **C** from directly contacting the conducting area **1240** in the second wafer **130** in the event of an overpressure. As will be explained, the protective layer **1252** may also prevent portions of the conducting area **1240** from being inadvertently removed (e.g., as the sensor is being created).

As illustrated in FIG. **16**, the conducting layer **1110** of the first portion **1100** may then be bonded to the protective layer **1252** of the second portion **1200** to create a pressure sensor **1600**. Note that non-aligned bonding techniques may be used to attach the two portions **1100**, **1200**.

According to some embodiments, a vacuum is created in the cavity **C**. For example, the portions **1100**, **1200** may be bonded at a low temperature and the temperature may then be increased in a vacuum environment to create a vacuum in the cavity **C**. According to other embodiments, a pre-determined pressure is sealed into the cavity **C** (e.g., to produce a gate sensor that determines whether an input pressure exceeds the pre-determined pressure by a threshold amount).

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The first wafer **1120** may then be removed. For example, a potassium hydroxide wash may be used to etch away the first wafer **1120**. In this case, the p++ Si conducting layer **1110** may automatically stop or slow down the etching process.

In addition, portions of the conducting layer **1110** may be removed as illustrated in FIG. **17**. For example, a mask may be used to pattern the areas to be removed. Note that the protective layer **1252** may prevent the conducting area **1240** and the bias area **1242** from being inadvertently removed.

A short oxide etch may then be performed on the sensor **1600** to remove the protective layer **1242** from certain areas as illustrated in FIG. **18**. Note that the conducting diaphragms may prevent the protective layer **1252** from being removed inside the cavity C and the reference cavity REF C.

As illustrated in FIG. **19**, a metallic deposit and mask may be used to create: (i) a pressure electrode contacting the diaphragm over the cavity C, (ii) a reference electrode contacting the diaphragm over the reference cavity REF C, (iii) a ground electrode contacting the conducting areas **1240** under the cavity C and the reference cavity REF C, and (iv) a bias electrode to provide a potential to the substrate of the second wafer **1230**.

FIG. **20** is a top view of the pressure sensor **1600** in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The pressure electrode and the ground electrode may be used to determine any change in capacitance between the conducting diaphragm **1112** and the conducting area **1240** under the cavity C. That is, a change in capacitance may be detected and used to determine a change in pressure to which the conducting diaphragm **1112** is being exposed. Note that any technique might be used to measure an amount of and/or a change in capacitance. For example, a change in capacitance might be converted into a voltage that can be measured and/or approaches using Alternating Current (AC) could be implemented.

The reference electrode and the ground electrode may be used to determine any change in capacitance between the reference diaphragm **1114** and the conducting area **1240** under the reference cavity REF C. The reference cavity REF C may, for example, be used to help determine when a change in capacitance associated with the conducting diaphragm **1112** is due to a change in temperature and humidity as opposed to a change in pressure. Note that the reference cavity REF C may be smaller than, larger than, or the same size as the cavity C. For example, when air is the dielectric for the cavity C and oxide is the dielectric for the reference cavity REF C, the reference cavity REF C might be smaller than the cavity C (e.g., because oxide has a higher dielectric constant than air).

FIG. **21** illustrates a method to measure pressure according to some embodiments. At Step **2102**, a voltage level is provided to at least one of (i) a conducting portion of a wafer and (ii) a conducting diaphragm in accordance with any of the embodiments described herein. For example, the conducting portion may be associated with a wafer having a substantially flat surface defining a plane. Moreover, the wafer may have an insulating layer on the surface, and the insulating layer may include a cavity proximate to the conducting portion. The conducting diaphragm may be bonded to the insulating layer to cover the cavity and may be substantially parallel to the plane defined by the surface of the wafer.

At Step **2104**, the capacitance between the conducting portion and the conducting diaphragm is measured. At Step **2106**, an amount of pressure is determined based on the capacitance measured at Step **2104**.

Thus, some embodiments may provide a MEMS sensor that is accurate and inexpensive to produce (e.g., because the

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thicknesses of the diaphragms and cavities can be accurately defined and controlled by growing layers on silicon wafers).

The following illustrates various additional embodiments of the invention. These do not constitute a definition of all possible embodiments, and those skilled in the art will understand that the present invention is applicable to many other embodiments. Further, although the following embodiments are briefly described for clarity, those skilled in the art will understand how to make any changes, if necessary, to the above-described apparatus and methods to accommodate these and other embodiments and applications.

Some embodiments have been described herein with respect to an absolute pressure sensor, but embodiments may be used in connection with a gauge or differential pressure sensor. For example, a first pressure P1 may be applied to the outer surface of the conducting diaphragm. Moreover, a passage may be provided into the cavity C through which a second pressure P2 is introduced. In this case, a change in capacitance would be associated with a difference between the two pressures P1, P2. According to another embodiment, a low doped layer is patterned with a conducting layer on the side opposite the cavity C (e.g., which may lower parasitics).

While embodiments have been described with respect to pressure sensors, note that any of the embodiments may be associated with a system that uses a pressure sensor. For example, FIG. **22** is a system **2200** constructed in accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the invention. The system **2200** includes a MEMS pressure sensor **2210** that operates in accordance with any of the embodiments described herein. For example, the MEMS pressure sensor **2210** might include an apparatus such as the one illustrated in FIGS. **19** and **20**.

Information from the MEMS pressure sensor **2210** is provided to a pressure dependent device **2220** (e.g., via an electrical signal). The pressure dependent device **2220** might be, for example, associated with a pressure display, a pressure monitor, an engine or automotive device (e.g., a tire pressure monitor), an ultrasonic transducer, a medical device (e.g., a blood pressure sensor), and/or a barometer.

In addition, although some embodiments have been described with respect to the use of a capacitance value to sense an amount of pressure, embodiments might be associated with other types of displacement, sensing techniques. For example, the deformable, conducting diaphragms described in any of the embodiments described herein may be replaced with diaphragms that have piezoelectric and/or piezoresistance characteristics (or devices having such characteristics may be embedded into or onto the diaphragms). According to this embodiment, an amount of resistance associated with the diaphragm will vary depending on an amount of stress. As a result, the resistance may be measured and used to determine a corresponding amount of pressure (e.g., an increase in pressure will cause the diaphragm to flex more and thus change the resistance). Note that according to this embodiment, the diaphragm may or may not be conductive. According to some embodiments, changes in both capacitance and resistance are used to determine an amount of pressure.

Further, although particular layouts and manufacturing techniques have been described herein, embodiments may be associated with other layouts and/or manufacturing techniques. For example, cap wafers with pressure and/or electrical ports may be provided for any of the embodiments described herein. Such wafers may, for example, be used to interface with an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) device.

Some embodiments described herein have included a conducting portion **140** embedded in or on wafer **130**. Note however, that the entire wafer **130** might act as the conducting portion (e.g., a highly doped silicon layer from a SOI wafer).

The present invention has been described in terms of several embodiments solely for the purpose of illustration. Persons skilled in the art will recognize from this description that the invention is not limited to the embodiments described, but may be practiced with modifications and alterations limited only by the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A sensor apparatus, comprising:

a wafer having a substantially flat surface defining a plane and lacking a cavity;

an insulating layer on the surface of the wafer, the insulating layer including a cavity and a reference capacitor spaced apart from said cavity, said reference capacitor being unaffected by a pressure change;

a bias area associated with the wafer and disposed apart from the conducting portion:

a conducting portion associated with the wafer and proximate to the cavity such that the conducting portion is not in direct contact with the insulating layer; and

a conducting diaphragm bonded to the insulating layer, wherein the conducting diaphragm covers the cavity and is substantially parallel to the plane.

2. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the wafer is a lightly doped silicon wafer and the conducting portion comprises a highly doped conducting area.

3. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the conducting diaphragm is deformable in a direction substantially normal to the plane.

4. The apparatus of claim **3**, wherein the conducting portion and the conducting diaphragm are electrically isolated from each other, and a pressure is to be measured based at least in part on capacitance between the conducting portion and the conducting diaphragm.

5. The apparatus of claim **4**, wherein a voltage level is associated with at least one of the conducting portion and the conducting diaphragm.

6. The apparatus of claim **5**, wherein an increase in pressure is associated with an increase in capacitance.

7. The apparatus of claim **1**, further comprising:

a non-conducting protective layer on the conducting portion.

8. The apparatus of claim **1**, further comprising at least one of: (i) a pressure electrode, (ii) a ground electrode, (iii) a reference electrode, or (iv) a bias electrode.

9. A pressure sensor, comprising:

a lightly doped silicon wafer having a substantially flat surface defining a plane and lacking a cavity;

an insulating layer formed on the surface of the silicon wafer, the insulating layer including a cavity and a reference capacitor spaced apart from said cavity, said reference capacitor being unaffected by a pressure change;

a bias implant area in the silicon wafer in an area spaced apart from the conductive implant area;

a highly doped conductive implant area in the silicon wafer in an area proximate to the cavity, wherein the insulating layer is not in direct contact with the highly doped conductive implant area;

a conducting diaphragm bonded to the insulating layer, wherein the conducting diaphragm covers the cavity and is substantially parallel to the plane; and

a device to measure capacitance between the implant area and the conducting diaphragm.

10. A system, comprising:

a microelectromechanical system pressure sensor, including:

a wafer having a substantially flat surface defining a plane and lacking a cavity,

an insulating layer on the surface of the wafer, the insulating layer including a cavity and a reference capacitor spaced apart from said cavity, said reference capacitor being unaffected by a pressure change,

a bias area associated with the wafer and disposed apart from the conducting portion;

a conducting portion associated with the wafer and proximate to the cavity such that the conducting portion is not in direct contact with the insulating layer, and

a conducting diaphragm bonded to the insulating layer, wherein the conducting diaphragm covers the cavity and is substantially parallel to the plane; and

a pressure dependent device.

11. The system of claim **10**, wherein the pressure dependent device is associated with at least one of: (i) a pressure display, (ii) a pressure monitor, (iii) an ultrasonic transducer, (iv) a medical device, and (v) a barometer.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 7,560,788 B2
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INVENTOR(S) : Fortin et al.

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

In Column 6, Line 44, delete “displacement,” and insert -- displacement --, therefor.

In Column 7, Line 20, in Claim 1, delete “portion:” and insert -- portion; --, therefor.

Signed and Sealed this

First Day of September, 2009



David J. Kappos
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office